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Water Levels for the Great Lakes and Montreal Harbour *... a monthly bulletin from Canadian Hydrographic Service*

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LEVEL news

Great Lakes St. Lawrence River Water Levels

Volume 3, Number 6 **June 9, 1995**

Some Rise In Levels Still Likely This Summer

Lakes Still Lower Than In June 1994

Water levels of the Great Lakes rose in May, although all the lakes began June between 10 and 30 cm lower than they were at the same time last year.

In comparison to their long-term averages, Lakes Superior and Ontario began the month between 12 and 20 cm below their means for the time of year. Lakes Michigan-Huron, St. Clair and Erie started the month between 5 and 15cm above average.

Lake Superior's level reached chart datum in March and April but began to recover in May as additional rainfall allowed the lake's seasonal rise to continue.

Low Superior Levels

Lower-than-average water levels on Lake Superior translated to lower flows in the St. Marys River. In April, periods of easterly winds caused some delays to ships when the river's level fell below chart datum. The May rise in Superior's level helped alleviate these problems.

Assuming average water supplies, the levels of Lakes Superior, Michigan-Huron and Ontario are expected to rise by 15, 5 and 10 cm respectively over the next two months. The levels of Lakes St. Clair and Erie are expected to begin their seasonal declines within the next month.

Extremely wet or dry weather could cause water levels to rise above or fall below those forecast.

Preliminary figures show the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Basin received 89% of average precipitation for May. Lake Superior received 103%; Lakes Michigan-Huron,82%; Lake Erie and Lake St. Clair), 104%; and Lake Ontario, 68%. These figures are subject to revision.

St. Lawrence Board Meets Citizens

Concern about low water levels was the main topic of discussion at a recent public meeting of the International St. Lawrence River Board of Control.

Approximately 50 citizens met the Board at a community centre in Dorval, Quebec, on May 15.

Shoreline property owners and boaters alike expressed concern about lower-than-average spring water levels in the Lac St-Louis and Montréal areas of the St. Lawrence River.

Board representatives explained that lack of precipitation on the Lake Ontario basin through the winter and spring caused low lake levels and outflows. The Ottawa River, which meets the St. Lawrence River near Montréal, also experienced below-average flows.

Port Level Rises

After plunging to a 30-year low for the month of April, the Port of Montréal's level rose in May due to increased rainfall and higher outflows from the Ottawa River system. The increased water supplies also caused a rise in the level of Lac St-Louis.

The additional supplies helped the harbour recover from low levels that had earlier forced some departing ships to leave cargo behind and some incoming vessels to detour for deeper ports.

Difficult Beginning

The recreational boating season in the Montréal and Thousand Islands areas got off to a difficult start in May due to lower-than-average water levels. But the rise in levels later in the month helped ease boaters' concerns somewhat.

Nevertheless, water levels on Lake Ontario and in the Montréal area of the St. Lawrence continue below their averages for the time of year.

In April the Board of Control began reducing Lake Ontario's outflow in an effort to conserve water on the lake.

However, the effectiveness of this measure has been limited by the need to minimize low water problems for shippers and recreational boaters in the Montréal area, as well as by high water levels immediately upstream of the regulation structure.

High Water Level

Low flows through the power dam at Cornwall caused high water concerns on Lake St. Lawrence immediately upstream of the dam. While river levels in the Montréal area continued below average, Lake St. Lawrence residents saw a dramatic rise, which led to concerns about flooding of docks.

Be Prepared

"The variability in St. Lawrence River levels should be a signal to boaters that they need to plan ahead for fall," cautions Peter Yee.

"Don't wait until the last minute to see if water levels will allow you to get your boat out at the same place you brought it in."

Testing Changes

The International St. Lawrence Board of Control has been running computer similations of two potential improvements to Lake Ontario's regulation plan.

One prospect, called Plan 35-P is a refinement of the existing regulation plan, 1958-D. It is a product of the International Joint Commission's Levels Reference Study, which was completed in 1993. The second, called Plan IS-4, uses an "optimization" technique to achieve the best possible compromise among the needs of various interests.

Considers Interests

Both potential plans take into consideration the needs and preferences of hydropower, navigation, recreational boating, shoreline property and environmental interests.

The regulation plan simulations will continue for the next three years. The existing regulation plan will remain in effect during this period.

Superior Board

The International Lake Superior Board of Control will meet the public on **Tuesday, June 27, at 7 p.m.** at the Civic Centre, 99 Foster Drive, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.

For more information, contact Peter Yee at (613) 938-5725.

Niagara Board

The International Niagara Board of Control will host an open house on **Thursday, September 28 at 7:30 p.m.** at Navy Hall on Ricardo Street, Niagara-on-the-Lake.

For more information contact Len Falkiner at (905) 336-4947.

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